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RECENT THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY¹

Those of us whose theological studies took us to Germany a quarter of a century or more ago will recall the impression made upon our minds by the extraordinary extent to which every possible object of human knowledge was classified and indexed. The classrooms of the university were like so many shelves in a gigantic filing system, and each professor, as the lecture-hour began and we drew out our *Heften* to receive the day's store of new knowledge, took down from its appropriate pigeonhole the particular topic or topics which were to serve us with material for the day. What was true of each lecture was true of each course as a whole. It had its place in the organism of knowledge as part of a particular discipline with set boundaries and definite content. The relation of these different studies to one another and to the other studies of the university was explained in a special discipline entitled *Theological Encyclopedia*, whose function it was to give a bird's-eye view of the theological filing system as a whole.

But the student who turned to *Theological Encyclopedia* expecting to get light on the bearing of his study upon life was destined to disappointment. If the study of each special discipline was filled with details, this was even more the case with *Theological Encyclopedia*. Instead of a simple discussion of the great questions which are common to all the departments, he was confronted with an elaborate table of contents of each special discipline and a list of authors or of subjects with few of which he had any previous acquaintance, and in still fewer of which he had any vital interest. Order and system were there in remarkable degree, but interpretation in any large sense of the term was conspicuous by its absence.

There was something imposing in this Prussianization of knowledge. It reminded one of the serried ranks of soldiers on the Tempelhofer

¹*A Guide to the Study of the Christian Religion.* By William Herbert Perry Faunce, Shailer Mathews, J. M. Powis Smith, Ernest DeWitt Burton, Edgar Johnson Goodspeed, Shirley Jackson Case, Francis Albert Christie, George Cross, Errett Gates, Gerald Birney Smith, Theodore Gerald Soares, Charles Richmond Henderson, and George Burman Foster. Edited by Gerald Birney Smith. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1916. x+759 pages. \$3.00.

Feld on the occasion of the emperor's annual review: each man in his own place, each under orders from his superior officer, each part of a great system embracing every department of the state and including every human life. But there were disadvantages too. What was gained in order was lost in initiative. Somewhere up at the top there might be a General Ludendorff who surveyed the field of knowledge as a whole and knew why each division was where it was and what was the relation of the parts to the whole; but of this the ordinary student knew as little as the ordinary private. He did his job, content within the limited boundaries of his own specialty, heaping up a few new facts, devising, if he were fortunate, a new theory or two, getting his name added to the catalogue of those already immortalized in his own little section, but ignorant of what was going on in the other sections of the great army of research. He was a scientist pure and simple, but with philosophy in the large sense of the word he was concerned little if at all.

Once in a while a voice was heard asking questions. Here and there one found among the professors a man of vision who realized that theology was concerned with religion, and that religion was a phase of human experience only to be understood by one who has himself lived. There were lecture-rooms where one gained not only knowledge but insight, not only information but inspiration. But there was no one who felt it his duty to apply to the study of theology as a whole the principles which here and there were vitalizing the study of its parts.

And yet clearly, if theology was to be reclaimed from the tyranny of classification and made the human thing which in its ideal it ought to be, some such effort was necessary. There must be someone to take the more thoughtful students of theology into his confidence, to tell them what was the meaning of the great enterprise on which they were asked to engage, to distinguish amid the mass of facts which they passed in review those which were significant from those which had had their day; someone to point out to them the crucial problems, the abiding realities; someone, in a word, to make theology what it has always been to the geniuses of religion, a search after wisdom, an interpretation of life.

Some such ideal inspired Wernle in the notable contribution which he made some years ago in his *Einführung in das Theologische Studium*. Here was a book which professed to be a theological encyclopedia, and yet was alive and interesting—a book addressed to theological students as young men coming up to the university with human needs of guidance and leadership; a book which set out to tell them the things that they needed to know in order to find their way about this great area of

knowledge without getting lost; a book that approached each of the big disciplines of theology with the questions: What does this mean? What is it after? What in it is alive? Above all, what is growing? What has promise of the future? It was a learned book, as everything German is learned. It was a technical book, as everything German is technical. But it was a book that was alive because it was written by a man for men, to interpret a phase of human life. It set up an ideal which must be followed by other teachers of theology if theology is not to degenerate into the arid waste of antiquarian triviality which it is commonly supposed to be.

Wernle's book appeared in 1908 (2d ed., 1911), and during all these years its challenge has been unheeded by our American theological scholarship. Not only has no translator been found for it, but no English-speaking theologian has felt moved to do in his own way and for his own public what Wernle tried to do for his. At last, however, we have an introduction to theology which professes to enter this unoccupied field and perform this notable task. It deserves, therefore, a hearty welcome, and its authors will not be surprised if it meets a scrutiny as exacting as its importance deserves.

Unlike Wernle's book, this is the work not of a single author but of a collection of writers. No less than a dozen different persons contribute chapters on such subjects as "The Preparation in College for the Study of Theology," "The Historical Study of Religion," "The Study of the Old Testament and the Religion of Israel," "The New Testament," "Early Christianity," "The Catholic Church," "The Protestant Reformation," "Modern Christianity," "Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics," and "Practical Theology." Chapters on "Christianity and the Great Social Problems" and "The Contribution of Critical Scholarship to Ministerial Efficiency" complete the list. The editor is Professor Gerald Birney Smith, of the University of Chicago, and among his collaborators are President Faunce, Dr. Shailer Mathews, Professors Powis Smith, Burton, Case, Christie, Cross, Gates, Soares, Henderson, and Foster. Most of these are members of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, and the book as a whole may fairly be regarded as its contribution to constructive theological scholarship. For every reason, therefore, it demands careful and sympathetic study.

Yet at the outset the reviewer finds himself embarrassed by a serious difficulty. How shall this book be judged and by what canons shall it be tested? Shall it be regarded as a contribution to the old *Theological Encyclopedia* or to the new? Does it offer us a philosophical

interpretation of religion as a whole, or is it simply the old filing system brought down to date? Clearly our standard of judgment will be different according as we take it for one of these or for the other.

On the face of it, it would seem as though we had here a book of the old type. There are changes in the rubrics to be sure. Church history is broken up into a number of different sections which are labeled with good modern names. The religion of Israel takes its place side by side with the New Testament. Chapters are added dealing with the practical implications of the subjects that are studied, and in many of the chapters, as indeed could not be otherwise when we take into account the men from whose pens they come, we find freshness of perception, breadth of vision, originality of approach. Yet in spite of this the book as a whole reads like a book of the old type. It is broken up into a number of little subsections, each dealing with its own division of the field. It has its selected lists of literature after the fashion of the old encyclopedias. It packs into a narrow compass a wealth of technical information that must tax the resources of the most advanced student unless he is content to take it in the docile and receptive spirit in which his fellow-student across the sea is accustomed to receive from his professor the pabulum that is given him.

Judged from this point of view there is much that can be said in commendation of this book. As a compendium of information as to the present state of theological scholarship it is comprehensive and in many of its fields adequate. Particularly excellent are the discussions of the New Testament by Professors Burton and Goodspeed and of systematic theology by the editor. There is, to be sure, a considerable amount of repetition. There are differences in the attitude of the different writers to their task which reveal a certain lack of editorial supervision (e.g., that of Professors Cross and Christie, who suggest problems; that of Professor Mathews, who offers us solutions). But these are minor blemishes in a very useful and important piece of work. If the impartation of information were the standard by which we were to judge the work of Dr. Smith and his collaborators we should have for them only gratitude and praise.

But as a matter of fact this is not the standard by which they ask to be judged. The editor begins by calling attention to the significant transformations through which Christianity is passing today, the changes in the ideals and the method of theological education, and the lack of literature from which one can learn how the modern divinity school is attempting to meet the demands of the age. He promises us a volume

which shall meet this need. It professes to be "a guide to the study of the Christian religion for Protestants." It does not attempt to take the place of actual study or to furnish a brief compendium of information. It is prepared primarily to aid students to understand the meaning of the various aspects of education for the Christian ministry. And still more, it is meant "for the pastors who wish to keep in sympathetic touch with the latest scholarship, but who find it difficult to obtain in convenient form the requisite information." This is the ideal which the book sets for itself, and by this test it must be judged.

Measured by this standard we must confess to disappointment. Compared with Wernle's book it is distinctly less successful. This is in part no doubt due to the fact that it is the work of a collection of writers and not of a single mind. It is hard to see how the particular piece of work which Wernle tried to do for his own day can be successfully accomplished by a number of different writers. This difficulty the editor feels, but he explains the choice of his own method on the ground that it is more difficult today to prepare an introduction to theology than it was a generation ago. Then, he tells us, it was possible for one broad-minded scholar to cover the entire field with reasonable thoroughness; but today specialization has advanced so far that no one man is competent to deal with all branches of learning tributary to a sound theological education.

If Dr. Smith's ideal were that of Hagenbach and his successors this would indeed be true, but if what is needed is really a guide to the study of the Christian religion it is to be feared that the gain in accuracy is ill compensated for by the loss of unity.

For what is it, after all, that we need in an introduction to theology which shall be a true guide to the study of the Christian religion in this transition period? Clearly it must be a book which shall do just what the old encyclopedia failed to do, namely, conceive the study of theology as a unity. It must define the subject-matter with which theology has to do, not simply in one or other of its disciplines, but in them all. It must discriminate between the great problems on which everything turns and the subsidiary questions on which one may differ without materially affecting one's point of view as a whole. It must give these vital problems the central place and subordinate the scientific division into disciplines to the human interest in the subjects with which the disciplines deal.

Among the topics with which an adequate introduction to theology must deal are such as these: What is theology, and what is its place in

the organism of knowledge? What is religion, and what is its function in human life? What are the permanent types of religion which reappear from age to age and from nation to nation? What is the relation between the great complexes which we call the historic religions and the variant forms which struggle for the mastery within each? What do we mean by Christianity, and what is its place in the family of religions? What is distinctive in Christianity, and what is the significance of the rival claimants for the Christian name which have emerged from time to time and still persist? What do we mean by Catholicism, by Protestantism, by mysticism, by modernism? These are the questions on which the man who would understand the Christian religion needs guidance, and it is only as they contribute to the answer to these questions that the special disciplines of the theological seminary justify their existence. It will not do to leave their discussion to the chapter on "Systematic Theology," however excellently it may be written. One must put them in the forefront of the discussion. They are the landmarks by which the road builders must blaze their way.

When we apply this standard to the work of Dr. Smith and his collaborators we must be prepared for disappointment. There is no discussion of theology in its relation to the other great departments of human knowledge. Instead of this we are offered a brief chapter on the "Preparation in College for the Study of Theology." There is no adequate treatment of such fundamental conceptions as religion, Christianity, Protestantism, Catholicism, and the like. Instead of this we have a number of brief discussions dealing with special phases of each. There is indeed a chapter on the "Historical Study of Religion" which, in the structure of the book, seems designed to meet this need of preliminary orientation, but it touches only a part of the field, and this in the most inadequate fashion.

This inadequacy appears at two points: in its content and in its method. Professor Mathews begins with a short discussion of the nature of religion, follows this by a brief survey of the chief steps in its historical development, gives five pages to the development of religious doctrine, and passes immediately to an outline of the development of Christian doctrine, which, if in place at all, should be relegated to one of the later chapters.

More unsatisfactory still is the method of the discussion, and this in two respects: first, in its undue emphasis on the intellectual aspect of religion; secondly, in its failure to point out the real significance and limitations of the historical method as applied to the study of religion.

It is natural that Professor Mathews, as a theologian, should be interested in the doctrinal aspects of religion; but surely place should be found in the introductory chapters of a guide to the study of the Christian religion for some interpretation of the significance of religion as piety and for some analysis of the fundamental conception of social religion—the church.

Not less disappointing is the author's failure fairly to describe and adequately to interpret in their relation to the practical task which confronts the student of theology the contrasted types of religious experience which persist throughout all changes in outward environment: such types as mysticism, sacramentarianism in its various forms, and ethical religion. Failure to trace these to their roots in human nature and to understand the human needs to which they answer makes it impossible to find one's way intelligently through the great drama of Christian history and to know how to estimate the conflicting forces which today contest within Christianity for the mastery. Such analysis belongs at the very beginning of the theological course, for it will give the key to all that follows.

If we ask why so obvious a fact should be overlooked by so accomplished an author as Professor Mathews, the answer is that it is due, in part at least, to failure to perceive the limitations of the historical method. The historical method (so far as it is anything else than a synonym for the scientific method in general) means the attempt to study religion as the story of a life-process—a process, therefore, which involves constant changes. But change is only one aspect of life as we know it. There is permanence as well. What has been once tends to recur again. The plant unfolds through certain predictable phases. Human life blossoms out through youth to maturity and ripens into old age. Types appear to which individuals tend to conform. There is change, but change according to law.

It is so in the life of religion. Religion too is the story of constant change, but it is the story of change according to law. Here too there is something that lasts. Types appear which persist. The insights of the past are crystallized into classics which become the inspiration of the insights of the future. Social religion becomes possible.

To show this also is the function of theology. Indeed it is in these abiding achievements alone that the unique interest of theology centers. But for this there is need of a broader conception of history than Professor Mathews gives us in his article. Psychology must be called into play which studies the laws of the inner life; the social sciences that

analyze the persistent forms of social organization. It is not enough to represent the history of civilization with Professor Mathews as "the genetic succession of several creative social minds." We must first make clear what we mean by a social mind, and explain how far its creations are permanent, and how far they are simply the reflex of changing impressions which pass with the passing of the environment.

The lack of an adequate foundation in preliminary analysis puts the writers of the later chapters at a disadvantage which they are not able wholly to overcome. Each treating his subject as an independent field, they are constantly taking for granted matters which have not been discussed, or referring forward to topics to be treated later. Excellent as independent essays, they fail to fit neatly into their places as parts of a single articulate whole. Why, for example, should matters of literary criticism be discussed independently by the writers on the Old Testament and on the New? Why should the discussion of the literature of religion precede the discussion of religion itself? Why should the story of the Christian church be divided up between three or four different writers without any attempt anywhere to give a bird's-eye view of the whole?

Most unsatisfactory is the treatment of practical theology. Here at least we might expect that the central conception of the church, for which one has looked in vain through all the preceding chapters, would receive adequate attention. But alas! room is not found for even a single subheading on this topic. The conventional subjects of the seminary curriculum receive each its fitting place—homiletics, church polity, church administration, pastoral care, liturgies, missions, religious education—but the church itself is taken for granted. The student is apparently supposed already to know all about that. As for the psychology of religion, that latest addition to the theological family, that appears as the last of the subheads, put there, it would seem, because the writer (or was it the editor?) was not quite sure what he ought to do with it.

To this disposition on the part of the writers of the different articles to lose sight of the larger problems in their emphasis upon details there is one notable exception. In Professor Smith's chapter on "Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics" we have a luminous and well-arranged consideration of the larger problems to which reference has been made. After a brief discussion of the method of theological inquiry he passes on to consider how the content of Christianity shall be determined. After contrasting the different methods which have been used in the

past and outlining his conception of the definition of Christianity from the historical point of view, he then gives us a clear and interesting presentation of the main doctrinal problems, after which the question is raised as to the truth of Christian beliefs. Under this caption we have a fresh treatment of the leading apologetic problems. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of Christian ethics.

For Professor Smith's treatment of his difficult and important subject-matter we have only praise. His chapter is indeed a guide to the study of the Christian religion, in which intending students and pastors seeking light can find the leadership they need. With such clear evidence of insight as this chapter reveals the question arises why the book as a whole does not make a more satisfying impression. Why must we wait for chapter ix before getting light on the fundamental questions which determine our attitude toward all the rest? This is a question of large interest which carries us altogether beyond the bounds of this present review and raises problems of permanent significance for theological education.

The answer is to be found in the unsatisfactory state of our present theological education. We are passing through a transition period in which two widely different methods are contending for the mastery, and the disorganized condition of the curriculum is the natural result. There is the old scholastic method whose unit is ideas and the method of the newer education whose unit is objects. In the latter case we make the subject studied the unit of our curriculum; in the former case the discipline that studies it. In the volume before us we have a book written by men who apply the object method to the work done within their particular departments under a scheme which was worked out by men who made the unit of organization ideas.

It is clear that such a situation cannot last. It makes no difference whether you approach your discipline from the point of view of the older orthodoxy or from the genetic point of view which controls the writers of this volume. If you think of theology as a collection of independent studies which deal with isolated aspects of a larger whole you are doomed to have what you have here—abstraction, unreality, repetition. If you conceive of theology as the study of a definite object, mainly religious, which maintains its unity through all the vicissitudes of its changing history, you must express that unity in the organization of your curriculum. You will not, to be sure, cease to cultivate the special disciplines or underestimate their contribution to the common task, but you will give them an altogether different significance. They

will no longer be independent units standing side by side, but workshops in which tools are fashioned which will make easier the accomplishment of a common task.

This is only another way of saying that we must recover the philosophical point of view, using the term philosophy, not in its technical sense as a synonym for metaphysics, but in the larger sense given it by Schleiermacher, as the science of definition. We must see our problem whole from the start, even if afterward we have to break up our attack upon it into its elements.

This conception of the task will have far-reaching effects upon the order of the curriculum. It will radically change the significance attached to systematic theology. It will distinguish its narrower and more technical function as the study that analyzes and classifies the contents of Christian belief from its wider function as the fundamental philosophical discipline which defines terms and analyzes problems. For systematic theology in its more technical sense the student may be content to wait till he has passed through the historical disciplines which in the traditional curriculum precede it; but with systematic theology in its larger relations he must make acquaintance at the outset if he is to do fruitful work. First of all the studies of the course must be the philosophy of religion. But this change cannot take place without carrying with it other changes as well. The psychology of religion, for example, must be rescued from its present position as an appendix to practical theology and seen to be what it is in fact, an integral part of the philosophy of religion, namely, that part which helps us to define religion in terms of experience. It is the psychology of religion which must give us the conceptions through which to approach the study of religion fruitfully, to guard against the one-sided intellectualism which has been so pernicious an influence on the theology of the past, to relate the classical experience of the great saints of the past to the more modern, but none the less vital, experiences which are ours today.

It will not do to think of psychology as merely a department of history, as is the case with our present-day genetic psychology. It is this and must be studied as such, just as the history of doctrine is a part of general history and must be studied as such. But it is more than this. It is, I repeat, the science which furnishes the philosopher of religion with the formative concepts which define his subject-matter. For religion, as we are coming to see more clearly every day, is more than doctrine, more than ritual. It is life with God, and in the recurring experiences of the souls of men repeating themselves from age to age in

the changing social environment we have the permanent element in religion, the subject-matter with which theology deals.

What is true of the psychology of religion is equally true of the social sciences which deal with the permanent forms of man's communal life. These too should hold a much more important place in the study of theology than has been given them in the traditional curriculum. It is one of the merits of this book that it emphasizes this fact and assigns a special chapter to the importance of the social sciences for the study of religion. But it is not enough to recognize that the social sciences contribute to religion. One must see what they contribute, and why. The real reason why the social sciences are so important for the student of theology is that they define the fundamental conceptions with which religion in its social forms is concerned. Central among these is the church. The church is the unit of organized religion. The definition of the church therefore belongs to that introductory discipline which we have called the philosophy of religion.

It may seem as if we were attributing too much importance to mere matters of order and relation. If the church be discussed somewhere, it may be asked, what difference does it make whether the discussion comes early or late? But the question itself shows that the questioner is still living in the departmental world from which the newer education seeks to emancipate us. If religion touches all sides of life—feeling and will as well as thought—if it is both individual and social, constant and changing, the play of contrasting types and the persistence of common experience, then we must recognize these facts from the start, and they must direct us in all our subsequent study. Only so can we be delivered from provincialism in theology, whether it be the provincialism of dogmatism or the no less dangerous provincialism of modern historical criticism.

There is still room then for a book which shall do in fact what this book professes to do—furnish a guide to the student of the Christian religion which shall help him to find his way through the mazes of modern scholarship with its countless unanswered and unanswerable questions to the simple and central realities of religion in which Christians of every name and age have found their bond of unity.

WILLIAM ADAMS BROWN

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